

**Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (eds.)**

*Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010. xiv + 400 pp., ISBN 978-0-19-547834-1.

This impressive volume consisting of an introduction and 13 papers on the intellectual thought and legacy of the Mamluk-Damascene polymath, jurist, traditionalist and acutely polemic theologian Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), is a significant indication of the thriving nature of ‘Taymiyyan’ studies in Western academia. Majid Fakhry, in his magisterial and highly influential opus, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, portrayed Ibn Taymiyya as central to ensuring the victory of the medieval neo-Ḥanbalī traditionalists over the schools of scholastic theology (*kalām*) and philosophy (*falsafa*) within the Islamic intellectual milieu. Fakhry, akin to the authoritative interpretations of Goldizher, Makdisi et al. maintained that Ibn Taymiyya had accomplished this feat by adopting firstly, a literalist approach to the Qur’ān and the Sunna, and secondly, the implementation of an inflexible antagonist polemic against the usage and primacy of reason (*‘aql*) in its relationship with revelation (*naql*). Consequently, this volume attempts to facilitate the revision of *inter alia*, the above mentioned image of Ibn Taymiyya *via* a meticulous elaboration of his epistemological, theological, heresiographical, ethico-legal and socio-political positions from several of his principal oeuvres.

The volume is divided into six thematic sections related to: Biography; Theology; Hermeneutics; Law; Shi‘i and Christian Polemics; and Legacy. Caterina Bori’s paper on the biographical aspects of Ibn Taymiyya’s intellectual life opens the volume and focuses on his intellectual circle (*jamā‘atuhu*). Bori emphasises several important themes which hitherto have been overlooked. Bori argues that Ibn Taymiyya *contra* to how he is generally perceived, was not the undisputed archetype of the traditionalist or even the Ḥanbalī community due to his indifferent approach to the authoritative legal hierarchical structures, approval of several controversial legal positions, and his excessive usage and reconciliation of reason with revelatory scripture in theological discussions (pp. 34f.). Consequently, Ibn Taymiyya was actually a charismatic leader of a small ‘radical’ circle of legally diverse scholars (p. 43) which was a minority influence and was rejected by the majority of traditional intellectual milieus.

The theology section consists of three papers. The first paper by Jon Hoover analyses Ibn Taymiyya’s theological position on God’s perfection *via* a discussion of his ‘voluntary attributes’. Hoover demonstrates that Ibn Taymiyya’s theological approach was not anti-rational but rather he was “an apologist for the coherence and rationality of the theological data found in the tradition” (p. 74), which Hoover refers to as “a kind of philosophical theology” (p. 56).

Subsequently, the paper establishes that Ibn Taymiyya's rejection of the concept of God's perfection as developed and proffered by the Ash'arīs was not due to any antagonism against the rational nature of their specific arguments. On the contrary: Ibn Taymiyya argued using reason in conjunction with revelation in preference for his own alternative conception and interpretation of God's perfection. The other two papers in the section discuss Ibn Taymiyya's harmonisation of reason and revelation by providing a more nuanced and intricate elaboration on the relationship, the nature of the synthesis and limits of this endeavour.

Mehmet Sait Özervarli in his paper refers to Ibn Taymiyya's theological approach as 'Qur'ānic rationalism'. Ibn Taymiyya disagreed with the Ash'arīs over their adoption of *al-qānūn al-kullī*, which conferred on reason the epistemic authority over revelatory knowledge in cases of conflict (p. 84). Thus, the literal meaning of the revelatory sources would be metaphorically re-interpreted via *ta'wīl* in order to reconcile it with reason. Ibn Taymiyya's 'Qur'ānic rationalism' in contrast insisted that reason could never contradict revelation, thus, the apparent contradiction alluded to by the Ash'arīs was based on an inconsistent and inappropriate form of rationalism that was not quintessentially Qur'ānic or Sunnaic in nature. In the final paper of the section, Racha el-Omari analyses Ibn Taymiyya's 'Theology of the Sunna', which was his attempt to justify his 'Qur'ānic rationalism' over the Ash'arī principle of *al-qānūn al-kullī* by appealing to the authority of the *salaf*. El-Omari demonstrates that Ibn Taymiyya uses the *salaf*, firstly, to legitimise his opposition to the conflicting theological interpretations, and secondly, to reinforce and identify his own interpretations as representing the authentic 'Sunna'.

Ibn Taymiyya's radical and innovative hermeneutical approach to the exegesis (*tafsīr*) of the Qur'ān is analysed in the first of the two contributions to the hermeneutics section by Walid Saleh's study of Ibn Taymiyya's *Muqaddima fī uṣūl al-tafsīr*. Saleh concisely describes Ibn Taymiyya's radical approach as "it claims to take *tafsīr* back to its roots in the *salaf* [...] effectively binding the divine word with the prophetic word in ways that had never been seen before in the Sunni tradition" (p. 148). Ibn Taymiyya used his *salaf-centric* hermeneutical approach to re-emphasise the supremacy of the 'Sunna' in Qur'ānic exegesis, and concurrently to exclude and invalidate the authority of non-Sunnaic hermeneutical approaches; for instance, theological, philosophical, philological and mystical. Livnat Holtzman in her paper elaborates on Ibn Taymiyya's and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's (d. 751/1350) hermeneutical approach in explaining the relationship between *fiṭra* and *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar*. Holtzman argues that Ibn Taymiyya's adherence to the *salaf* was neither rigid nor absolute, and the concepts of the *fiṭra* and *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar* were instances

where his interpretation explicitly contradicted the *salaf*. Thus, Ibn Taymiyya's hermeneutics attempted to "reconcile the highly deterministic and even fatalistic Hadith" (p. 164) in order to establish an alternative position against the free-will doctrine, the *kasb* theory and the literal determinism as espoused respectively by the Mu'tazilis, the Ash'arīs and in this instance the *salaf*. Holtzman demonstrates how Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya constructed their position by a synthetic approach which was influenced by theological adversaries such as the Ash'arī theologian *par excellence*, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 604/1209).

Yossef Rapoport's paper on Ibn Taymiyya's 'Radical legal thought' is the sole contribution to the law section. Rapoport insists that Ibn Taymiyya's 'Qur'ānic rationalism' permeated his theological and his legal thoughts. Similarly, in the legal realm, Ibn Taymiyya argued that the Qur'ān or the Sunna never contradicted 'correct' analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) as was claimed by other jurists (*fuqahā*). Thus, Ibn Taymiyya accepted rational legal inquiries and tools that were supported by Qur'ānic guidance. Also, Rapoport elaborates on the re-interpretation of *ijtihād*, *taqlīd* and *ijmā'* in Ibn Taymiyya's legal thought. This re-interpretation, Rapoport argues, enables "Ibn Taymiyya's rejection of legal authority, whether it is the legal school or the consensus of the scholars, leads him to adopt a remarkably pluralist position with regard to freedom of legal interpretation" (p. 206), and subsequently advocates a form of legal pragmatism against the idealistic legal malaise ubiquitous in Mamluk juristic circles. Finally, Rapoport demonstrates how Ibn Taymiyya's legal re-interpretation influenced discussions within both modern Islamic law and modern reformist movements.

The next section explicates Ibn Taymiyya's intra-Islamic and inter-religious polemics against the Shi'i and the Christians. Tariq al-Jamil analyses the *Minhāj al-sunna*, which was composed as a critique of the Imami Shi'i in general and a response to the *Minhāj al-karāma* of prominent Shi'i scholar al-Muṭahhar al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325) in particular. Al-Jamil argues that Ibn Taymiyya's critique was a response in part to the socio-political milieu due to the Mongol ilkhānid patronage of the Shi'i and, should be analysed within and not detached from that historical context. Ibn Taymiyya's critique revolved around the "ontological status of the Imam that allows him to assume certain divine prerogatives, such as an ability to foretell future events, communication with divine beings, and knowledge of the unseen (*'ilm al-ghayb*)" (p. 237). Al-Jamil maintains that Sunni-Shi'i polemic served to negotiate and delineate affiliations, boundaries, practises and orthodox beliefs of each community within their specific socio-historical milieu. David Thomas elaborates on Ibn Taymiyya's detailed refutation and anti-Christian polemic with a study of the tract

*al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*. Thomas demonstrates that Ibn Taymiyya's pragmatic approach permeated the *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ* as it had a dual purpose; firstly, as a refutation *per se* of Christian theological doctrine and secondly, and significantly, as an illustration of the errors, threats, deviations and heresies which the Muslim community should endeavour to circumvent in order to maintain religious integrity and orthodoxy.

The last section consists of three papers expounding on Ibn Taymiyya's intellectual influence and legacy on the subsequent eras of Islamic thought and, along with the theology section, is the most fascinating and insightful. Khaled El-Rouayheb's paper methodically investigates the views of prominent Sunni scholars on Ibn Taymiyya's intellectual thought over a period of three centuries (from the 16th to the 19th) in order to discern the true nature of his influence on the traditional scholastic milieu. El-Rouayheb's discussion of the diverse scholastic views on Ibn Taymiyya is centred on two of the foremost controversial Taymiyyan positions. The first is of a theological nature, which was his literal interpretation of the divine attributes of God as ascribed in the revelatory sources. The second is of a legal nature, which was his legal edict (*fatwā*) that visitations to the graves of the prophets and the saints were strictly forbidden (*ḥarām*). El-Rouayheb demonstrates the subsequent inferences about the perceived influence of Ibn Taymiyya: i) majority of Sunni scholars rarely engaged in Ibn Taymiyya's scholastic corpus and generally disregarded his critique of the Ash'arīs and his several controversial legal positions; ii) Ibn Taymiyya "had very little influence on mainstream Sunni, non-Ḥanbalī Islam" (p. 269); iii) before the 20th century only the Wahhabi movement embraced the 'Taymiyyan' approach in a holistic sense; iv) Ibn Taymiyya's influence on the Sunni tradition was 'exaggerated' and in retrospect was falsely ascribed.

Raquel Ukeles carefully analyses the modern debate on the legitimacy and legal status of celebrating the Prophet's birthday (*mawlid*) from both the contemporary Sufi and Salafi perspectives. Ukeles explains that both the Sufis and the Salafis paradoxically authenticate and reinforce their particular positions on the *mawlid* by appealing to the authority of Ibn Taymiyya. Ukeles demonstrates that Ibn Taymiyya's approach on the *mawlid* was more intricate and nuanced than at *prima facie*. Ibn Taymiyya resolutely insisted that the *mawlid* was an objectionable devotional innovation (*bid'a*) as it had no precedent in the Qur'ān or the Sunna. However, Ibn Taymiyya demarcated between "the piety of the person's intention or purpose (*niyya* and *qaṣd*)" (p. 333) and the nature of the act itself. Thus, according to Ibn Taymiyya a person would still be rewarded for his good intention but not for performing an innovative act. The Salafis embraced Ibn Taymiyya's argument that the *mawlid* was an innovative

act and should not be performed. While, the Sufis espoused in conformity with Ibn Taymiyya that a person is rewarded for his good intention.

Mona Hassan's paper is the final contribution to the volume and expounds on Ibn Taymiyya's political thought, which she argues was misinterpreted by Henri Laoust, the influential exponent of Taymiyyan studies in Western academia, and substantially influenced all subsequent research. Due to a misreading of *Minhāj al-sunna*, it was claimed that Ibn Taymiyya had rejected and, *contra* the traditional perspective, did not regard the caliphate as obligatory or necessary. Hassan, relying on several Taymiyyan works including *al-Siyāsa al-shar'īyya*, demonstrates that "far from demolishing classical jurisprudence on the caliphate, Ibn Taymiyya upholds Sunni sources and interpretations of the institutions" (p. 343). Hassan couples her re-interpretation of Laoust with an insightful discussion of the modern interpretations of Ibn Taymiyya's political thought by drawing attention to the opinions of the popular moderate scholar Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī and the militant *jihādī* Muḥammad 'Abd al-Salām Faraj.

The volume elaborates on the six themes in a comprehensive and nuanced approach. In spite of this, it would have been hoped that important themes about Ibn Taymiyya's mystical-spiritual thought and his ostensible conflicts with the Sufis and Sufism in general were substantially expounded in a similar approach. Nevertheless, this is only a slight oversight as this volume endeavours and succeeds to take 'Taymiyyan' studies to innovative realms of scholastic inquiry by providing a rigorous foundation for all subsequent research by elaborating on the *sine qua non* aspects of his intellectual thought and legacy.

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